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Helmuth Plessner's Schellingian Reconciliation of Idealism and Realism About the Psyche

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Abstract

While Schelling's anticipation of Freudian psychoanalysis is well established, it has thus far gone unnoticed that Schelling's ideas also proved fruitful in the context of a distinctively philosophical theory of the psyche developed by a younger contemporary of Freud. During the 1920s Helmuth Plessner, a key figure of philosophical anthropology, outlined a complex conception of the psyche as an individualized, inner region of reality. Although Plessner did not present his philosophical psychology in a systematic form, its building blocks can be found in *The Unity of the Senses*, *The Limits of Community*, and *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*, among other writings. Moreover, Plessner left a clue as to how these building blocks fit together, which suggests that Plessner viewed his philosophical psychology as structurally analogous to the model of personality outlined in Schelling's 1809 treatise on human freedom. I propose that Plessner sought to formulate an alternative to both idealism and realism about the psyche that might reconcile the insights motivating these rival positions. Schelling provided Plessner with a workable model for such a reconciliation. After reviewing textual evidence for my hypothesis, I sketch Schelling's predecessor theory. Based on the Schellingian template, I then reconstruct Plessner's non-reductively naturalistic theory of the psyche, which aligns the real bodily ground of the psyche with its ideal existence. Highlighting the strengths of Plessner's philosophical psychology against the foil of Paul Ricoeur's and John McDowell's relevant arguments, I argue that the theory reconstructed here deserves contemporary consideration as a plausible contender.

Keywords F. W. J. Schelling · Helmuth Plessner · Mind–body problem · Philosophical anthropology · Philosophy of psychology · Psyche

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Introduction

The topic of the soul would appear to be one of the subject matters that mainstream philosophy had largely abandoned by the early twentieth century. As a result of confluent intellectual developments, talk of the soul or the psyche gave way in most areas of philosophical discussion to talk of the mind, consciousness, the self, *Dasein*, the subject, or the brain, to mention only the closest rival terms. Of course, the concept of soul did not vanish. It survived in folk psychology, religion, and literature. In psychoanalysis, moreover, the soul came to occupy center stage as the object, and the subject, of a therapeutic practice that took shape in tandem with a new type of theoretical inquiry. Determined to place the discipline he had founded on an autonomous footing, Freud tended to underplay or ignore the thematic contiguities and historical continuities of his enterprise with philosophical ideas. Nevertheless, key elements of psychoanalytic theory are traceable to precedents in philosophy. In particular, several scholars have noted that the psychoanalytic project inaugurated by Freud has affinities with, and was indirectly influenced by, J. W. F. Schelling's pronouncements on the unconscious dimension of mental life (Ellenberger, 1970: 202–204; Marquard, 1982: 85–106; Marquard, 1987: 162–66, 222–24, 228–35, 435–36, n95; Redding 1999: 123–26; Makari, 2008: 64f.; Ffytche, 2012; Gardner, 2013: 144–46).

Schelling's influence on modern thinking about the psyche is not limited, however, to psychoanalysis. His ideas also proved fruitful in the context of a distinctively philosophical account of the psyche developed by a younger contemporary of Freud, namely, Helmuth Plessner. A key figure of interwar-era philosophical anthropology, Plessner resisted dominant trends in philosophy by maintaining an interest in the ancient topic of the soul. Approaching this topic from a new angle informed in part by psychoanalytic insights, Plessner's works from the 1920s adumbrate a complex account of psychological reality. Although Plessner did not present his account in a systematic form, its main strands can be found in the series of writings that he published between 1923 and 1928. Moreover, Plessner gives us a pointer as to how these argumentative strands combine into a unified theory. This clue indicates, or so I will argue in what follows, that Plessner viewed his philosophical psychology as analogous in its overarching layout to a theory expounded by Schelling. My first objective here is to reconstruct Plessner's conception of the psyche in light of its Schellingian model. My second aim is to show that Plessner's conception of the psyche holds considerable philosophical appeal.

It makes sense to begin by locating the topic of the psyche within Plessner's enterprise. Plessner's philosophical anthropology is often said to afford a non-dualistic approach to the mind–body problem. While not false, this scholarly commonplace is somewhat imprecise. For a more accurate characterization of Plessner's position, we first of all need to distinguish between a minimal and a robust sense of the term "mind". On the minimal understanding, the term refers to the power to bear a conscious relation to one's surroundings, to be minded at all. It is then one of Plessner's major innovations to have outlined a non-dualistic

theory of what it means to be minded in this minimal sense. By construing mind as a manifestation of bodily life and allowing for animal forms of mindedness, Plessner breaks with the Cartesian and anthropocentric bias of much of modern philosophy (Dornbach, 2023). In addition, however, Plessner's philosophical biology also offers a non-dualistic account of the mind taken in the robust sense applicable to humans alone. With respect to this more demanding understanding of the term, we need to draw a further distinction between two aspects of mental life that talk of the mind in the Anglophone discussion typically runs together. The first aspect usually figures under the rubric of *Geist* in German and that of "spirit" in English. Plessner initially defines spirit as the system of those normative orientations whose objectivations constitute the non-instrumental spheres of culture (P 3: 149–150).[1] He later redefines spirit along Hegelian lines, as a social horizon of intelligibility sustained by relations of reciprocal recognition (L: 304–306). These two definitions may be understood as highlighting interdependent aspects of spirit construed as a recognitive social framework supported by a shared and normative second nature. Distinct from spirit is the second aspect of mind, namely, the interior region of reality that is commonly called the soul or psyche (*Seele*). Whereas spirit is the socially shared dimension of mind, the soul is its individualized aspect, to which its bearer enjoys a type of access that is uniquely intimate and formative, although neither complete nor infallible (L: 295–300).

Since Plessner expressly warns us that the conflation of these concepts results in animist and subjective idealist misconceptions (L: 304), we would do well to keep them apart. With this distinction firmly in place, we can ask about each term whether it designates something real or apparent, merely epiphenomenal. A reply that affirms realism regarding both spirit and the psyche must make us wonder, furthermore, how these dimensions of mind relate to one another and bodily life. Given the mapping of the basic options suggested by these questions, the most fitting label for Plessner's position is the one he cursorily uses in his 1923 work *The Unity of the Senses*: namely, "trimorphism" (P 3: 273). That is to say, Plessner's philosophical anthropology purports to account for "the essential difference between spirit, psyche, and body" (334). Yet, in contradistinction to "trialism" or "triple-essence theory," which construes body, psyche, and spirit as discrete substances, Plessner's argument establishes the "originary unity of spirit, soul, and body" as interdependent yet distinct dimensions of the human life form (LaC: 17f.; P 7: 218; PA: 4; P 5: 140). Plessner develops a unitary perspective on these three dimensions by means of an interpretive theory of living nature that allows him to construe human existence as

[1] Throughout the article, I use the following abbreviations to cite primary sources by Plessner and Schelling: **E** = (Plessner, 2002); **L** = (Plessner, 1975) [quotes in English are from (Plessner, 2019), with page references keyed to (Plessner, 1975), whose pagination is included in the English translation]; **LaC** = (Plessner, 1970); **LC** = (Plessner, 1999); **P**: (Plessner, 2003); **PA** = (Plessner, 2018); **S**: (Schelling,1860) [quotes in English are from (Schelling, 1994) and (Schelling, 2006), with page references keyed to the pagination of (Schelling, 1860)]; **SB** = (Schelling, 1870). Quotes from English translations are given with occasional modifications for the sake of accuracy. When no English translation exists, quotes are given in my translation.

one of the categorially distinct, basic forms of life–namely, the one that most fully actualizes the "boundary-realizing" character of organic life, its constant enactment of a boundary that separates and at the same time connects the living being's interior and its surroundings (Dornbach, 2023: 203–213). This approach allows Plessner to interpret the triad of body, psyche, and spirit as integral to a distinctive form of boundary-realizing life that constitutes a "threefold structure": it "is body, is in its body (as inner life or psyche), and is outside its body as the point of view from which it is both" (L: 293). He presents this account as an alternative to the long-standing tendency (inherited from Platonism, Christian theology, Descartes, and Luther) to oppose the soul and spirit, viewed as higher principles, to the supposedly degrading natural life of the body (LC: 58f.; P 5: 23f.; LC: 62; P 5: 27).

What this means with respect to spirit would require extensive clarification. For the present purposes, the bare outlines of Plessner's relevant argument should suffice. In short, Plessner's nature-philosophically grounded theory of the human being enables him to account for our capacity for conforming to intersubjectively binding norms and inhabiting a culturally mediated social sphere in terms of the "natural artificiality," expressivity, and historicity of a life form defined by the tendency to adopt a distanced, reflective stance towards one's own bodily life (termed "eccentric positionality"). To that extent, Plessner may be said to provide a non-reductively naturalistic account of spirit.[2]

With respect to the psyche as well, the upshot of Plessner's argument is its non-eliminative naturalization. That is, Plessner's undertaking to "de-fundamentalize" the Cartesian dichotomy between the observationally available material body and the introspectively available soul yields the demonstration that this "dual aspectivity" is neither a merely illusory or epiphenomenal difference nor an irreducible metaphysical dualism. Rather, there is a real divide between bodily exteriority and psychological inwardness, which is a constitutive feature of the human form of life–organic life in general being the ongoing actualization of the boundary between the interior of the organism and its surroundings. This much is generally agreed upon by scholars of Plessner, and there is in particular a consensus as to the negative thrust of Plessner's defundamentalization of the Cartesian dichotomy. Less often appreciated is the fact that Plessner's position entails the positive claim that there *is* such a thing as the psyche, though not in the sense affirmed by substance dualists. To some extent Plessner is to blame for lack of attention to this important point, inasmuch as he does not anywhere offer a systematic exposition of his theory of the psyche. Still, Plessner's works from the 1920s, written as they are with the psychoanalytic

[2] This understanding of Plessner's project is not uncontroversial. For an overview of the debate between interpretations that foreground the natural character of human life and those emphasizing historicality, and for a third position that asserts the "entwinement" of the two perspectives, see Mitscherlich (2007: 13–23). My own view, which will have to be presented elsewhere, is that Plessner in the 1920s sought to give a non-reductively naturalistic account of humans' essentially historical and culturally mediated form of life but did not fully succeed in achieving this goal, which led to a crisis registering in Plessner's 1931 book *Political Anthropology* and a subsequent reorientation in his thinking. Since it is possible, in my view, to salvage a modified version of Plessner's 1920s enterprise by correcting certain unforced errors in *The Unity of the Senses* and *Levels*, my argument in this paper presupposes the viability of Plessner's non-reductive naturalism.

revolution well underway, provoke the question: if the psyche is neither an illusion nor an immaterial substance, then what might it be?

Plessner's answer to this question is complex and original and deserves serious consideration. It will take a good deal of reconstructive work to bring this answer into view, however. Let me begin by laying my cards on the table regarding my approach to this task. My first two interpretive guidelines are quite general, and their detailed defense needs to be presented elsewhere. The first guideline is the thought that Plessner's works from the 1920s, while lacking the outward form of a system, nevertheless constitute a coherent theoretical framework encompassing epistemology, ontology, ethics, aesthetics, and–crucially for the present argument–a philosophical psychology. My second, related, guideline is that this framework represents, among other things, a bold attempt to rework key insights of German idealism in response to the new intellectual challenges of the interwar era (Fischer, 2012; Haucke, 2000, 2002). Central to Plessner's reworking of this complex legacy is his rehabilitation of the nature-philosophical paradigm that originally arose as a marginal offshoot of German idealism in the writings of Schelling and Goethe. Plessner is reworking German idealist arguments in terms of a non-reductionist form of naturalism.

When it comes to the specific task of reconstructing Plessner's philosophical psychology, we must chiefly draw on arguments developed in five works: (1) the 1922 article "Über den Realismus in der Psychologie" [*On Realism in Psychology*]; (2) Plessner's thus far untranslated major early work on the sensory modalities, *Die Einheit der Sinne: Grundlinien einer Ästhesiologie des Geistes [The Unity of the Senses: Outlines of an Aesthesiology of Spirit]* (1923); (3) the treatise *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism* (1924); (4) the treatise that Plessner co-authored with the Dutch animal psychologist F. J. J. Buytendijk, titled "Die Deutung des mimischen Ausdrucks: Ein Beitrag zur Lehre vom Bewusstsein des anderen Ichs" ["The Interpretation of Mimic Expression: Towards a Doctrine of the Consiousness of Another I"] (1925); and finally (5), *Levels of Organic Life and the Human: An Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology* (1928), the magnum opus whose much-awaited English translation came out in 2019. Helpful formulations can be found, moreover, in the transcript of the lectures Plessner gave at the University of Cologne in 1931–32, titled *Elemente der Metaphysik [Elements of Metaphysics]*.

My approach to the arguments about the psyche that Plessner outlines in these works will be guided by two hypotheses. First, faced with the alternative between idealism and realism about the psyche, Plessner stakes out an intermediary position that combines these seemingly incompatible views. Second, the key to this theoretical feat can be found in Plessner's observation concerning an analogy between his conception of the psyche and a theory expounded by Schelling. Accordingly, I will use the Schellingian theory in question as a template for pulling together the seemingly disparate lines of thought that make up Plessner's philosophical psychology. The theory of the psyche that will emerge from this reconstruction deserves to be called "novel" (as Plessner calls his conception in LC: 42; P 5: 12) insofar as it transposes the Schellingian model into a different key. The chief underlying difference has to do with the conceptions of nature held by the two thinkers. While the turn to nature was one of the innovative features of Schelling's brand of idealism,

he was still in a position to resist the then-incipient technological-scientific disenchantment of nature (Marquard, 1987; Gardner, 2013: 151). Faced a hundred years later with the consolidated outcome of this process, Plessner recognizes that he has less leeway than did Schelling for developing an interpretive theory of living nature which might complement natural-scientific explanation (P 9: 70–72; P 9: 318). Unlike Schelling's boldly speculative predecessor theory, the account of the psyche embedded in Plessner's more austerely conceived philosophical biology has a strong claim to representing a live option in the contemporary context.

The structure of this paper follows from the hypotheses proposed in the above. In the section on "Idealism Versus Realism About the Psyche," I sketch the alternative between idealism and realism about the psyche and the phenomenological considerations that motivate Plessner's effort to reconcile these seemingly incompatible views. In the next section, titled "The Clue: Plessner's Allusion to Schelling's Un-Ground," I present evidence for the claim that Plessner viewed his proposed solution as analogous in structure to a theory expounded by Schelling. The section titled "The Schellingian Model" provides an outline of the Schellingian predecessor theory. In light of this template, I then reconstruct Plessner's conception of the psyche in the section titled "Plessner's Philosophical Psychology Reconstructed". Following some general comments on Plessner's Schellingian strategy and his departure from his predecessor, my "Conclusion" highlights some of the strengths of Plessner's philosophical psychology against the foil of two influential accounts, namely, Paul Ricoeur's interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis and John McDowell's argument about humans' inner world.

Idealism Versus Realism About the Psyche

If we want to gain an understanding of what is at stake for Plessner in the alternative between idealism and realism about the psyche, the best place to start is Plessner's earliest relevant publication, an article published in 1922 titled "Über den Realismus in der Psychologie" (*On Realism in Psychology*). Given that a key passage from this article is repeated verbatim in *Levels* (P 9: 41; L: 296), it is reasonable to assume that the basic parameters of the problem explored here remain by and large the same throughout Plessner's writings from the 1920s. My discussion of the 1922 article will therefore also draw on passages from *Levels*.

The article presents a problem confronting the then comparatively young science of psychology. The difficulties of establishing psychology as an experimental science and the indispensable role played by introspection are apt to provoke doubt as to whether psychology can be said to deal with "real givens" belonging to a "proper zone of being" that exists independently of observation (P 9: 28). According to the widely, if tacitly, held notion of reality from which Plessner takes his point of departure, something can be considered real if it satisfies the following three conditions: (1) it is intersubjectively available, (2) its reality is confirmed by successful action undertaken in light of it, and (3) it possesses a substantial being that is not exhausted by phenomenal aspects (P 9: 34–36). Idealists maintain that the psychological domain does not satisfy any of these criteria and therefore conclude that in this

connection Berkeley's dictum "esse est percipi" holds true. One of the background assumptions that favors this assumption is materialism. More important for Plessner, however, is the Neo-Kantians' tendency to assume that the exact sciences dealing with spatiotemporal objects represent the paradigmatic case of objective knowledge, to which psychology is a mere subjective supplement (P 9: 40f.). The Neo-Kantians maintain that the psychological domain consists of nothing but "lived experiences" (*Erlebnisse*), that is to say, atomic conscious episodes. In this view, a lived experience is not the mere "observation" of a pre-existing psychological content but its very "formation" (L: 297).

Plessner's characterization of Neo-Kantian philosophical psychology is likely based on relevant works by Paul Natorp, the leading contemporary figure of the so-called Marburg School, whom Plessner mentions in passing (P 9: 42). Natorp maintains that, whereas the physical sciences deal with the objects of intentional consciousness, psychology is exclusively concerned with its subjective pole. This subjective pole, the I, is not a substance according to Natorp but a descendant of Kant's formally defined transcendental subject: that is to say, "an expression of that unity of relation through which the manifold of the content of *one* consciousness constitutes *one* consciousness. For this reason, it is indeed impossible to say anything about the I that is not completely represented by the content and its relations" (Natorp, 1905: 54). Insofar as psychology has a proper domain at all that cannot be assimilated to that of the nomothetic sciences, it deals with the same phenomenal contents of consciousness as the natural sciences, only from the opposite angle. This means that psychology does not properly speaking have an object. It is the task of the natural sciences to asymptotically approximate objectivity by means of a constructive procedure that subsumes contents of consciousness under progressively more abstract concepts and laws. Psychology must perform a feat of abstraction in the reverse direction by undoing the conceptual constructs at work in scientific explanation, and indeed to some extent already in everyday experience (Natorp, 1905: 55f.). By means of this regressive procedure, psychology "reconstructs" those atomic subjective givens in their immediacy–sensations, strivings, hedonically valenced feelings–in which the conceptually mediated contents of conscious experience and scientific knowledge originate and which do not themselves figure as manifest contents of consciousness.

As Plessner notes, the atomism of idealistic psychology came under increasing strain as a result of empirical findings about the synthetic and productive character of psychological life, including about gestalt phenomena, and Freud's insights regarding the irreducible, holistic structures of meaning at work in the unconscious (P 9: 42). Moreover, the emergent human sciences, as theorized by Dilthey, gave rise to the felt need for a psychology that might allow us to understand human personality and character as a distinct region of reality. These developments conspired to make realism about the psyche ascendant. According to Plessner's mapping of the theoretical terrain, realism about the psyche comes in two varieties, which he terms "Heraclitean" and "Eleatic" (P 9: 42–44). The Heraclitean variant has been developed by Henri Bergson (2007), who maintains that inward intuition shows psychological reality to consist in pure duration, an impulsively animated qualitative multiplicity whose parts interpenetrate and which underlies the succession of measurable

time. The opposite, "Eleatic," pole of psychological realism has found its paradigmatic formulation in the 1921 book *Die psychische Dingwelt [The Psychic Thing-World]* by Wilhelm Haas, a psychologist and philosopher who was at the time Plessner's colleague at the University of Cologne. Haas (1921) takes the psychological domain to consist of discrete, bounded, thing-like contents that can remain latent and nevertheless influence us–such as traumatic memories, the subliminally felt mood of a place, or the "vibes" emanating from another person's character.

Although Plessner concedes that each of these forms of psychological realism has some phenomenological justification, he regards both as one-sided. Haas rightly recognizes that an element of psychological reality can be thing-like in being observable by others as well as its bearer. Nevertheless, a psychological content attains to full reality not in being observed but, rather, in being "gone through" (*durchgemacht*) by its bearer, who therefore enjoys a privileged relation to it (P 9: 37). Conversely, Plessner writes, "a mood vanishes if I do not pay attention to it. Love dies if it is not mirrored in the consciousness of the lover or the beloved. Affective and emotional germs in many cases need an act of taking [*Aktnehmen*] by consciousness in order to be able to develop, and wither when this fails to occur" (P 9: 38). When I go through a psychological content in conscious experiencing or self-reflection, it carries me away like a stream and becomes transformed in turn through my investment.

Plessner concludes that the puzzlement surrounding psychological reality stems from its "shifting character" (*das Gleitende*). It is the passage summarizing this ambiguity that Plessner will repeat verbatim in *Levels* in the section on humans' "inner world":

> Sometimes psychic content functions like a clearly delimited thing able to exert force, such as in the case of a psychic trauma, a complex in the psychoanalytic sense, or a distinct, pleasurable memory. Other times, such as when we are completely consumed by pain, desire, or any other affect, our psychic being permeates and floods us; any gap between the subject of the act of lived experience and the subject-core of the whole person disappears, and we are completely absorbed in the life of the psyche. Such conditions of our inner being are best described using metaphors of flowing movement. Between these two extremes of psychic reality lies a wide variety of intermediate forms. (9: 40; L: 296f.)

At this crucial point, an inconsistency in Plessner's argument becomes apparent. To recall, Plessner initially presented Bergson's Heraclitean and Haas's Eleatic portrayal of the psychological sphere as rival variants of realism about the psyche. However, the equal plausibility of these two contradictory portrayals has brought to light a more fundamental ambiguity that calls the realist premise itself into question. In particular, Bergson's Heraclitean vision of the psyche, though introduced by Plessner as a version of realism about the psyche, turns out to express an insight into the plasticity of psychological contents that lends support to psychological idealism. To be sure, talk of psychological reality as a distinct region of being seems justified insofar as psychological contents have a substantial being that is not exhausted by the acts of attention directed at them. Yet states of mind in which we are carried

away by psychological contents and which are in turn transformed by our investment in them suggest that the psyche is not, after all, entirely independent of our acts of consciousness in the way physical objects are. Plessner is thus compelled to admit that, unlike physical reality, the psyche is characterized by a merely "relative" independence from consciousness (P 9: 39). The article ends by acknowledging the underlying difficulty indicated by the inadequacy of both Bergson's and Haas's conception: "Both authors overlooked the real difficulty–the first in favor of subjectivity, the other in favor of reality–, that we are dealing with a type of being that is subjective and real, and which therefore cannot be either a pure stream and eternal change or solid thinghood" (P 9: 44). It is only in *Levels* that Plessner will finally be in a position to account for this ambiguity.

The Clue: Plessner's Allusion to Schelling's Un-Ground

As we have seen, Plessner's first foray into philosophical psychology peters out on an aporetic note, with the admission that the anomalous status of the psyche eludes the alternative between idealism and realism. The works that Plessner would subsequently write over the 1920s adumbrate a coherent solution to this puzzle if one that remains implicit in the absence of a systematic exposition. I now want to propose that the key to the overall shape of this solution is to be found in a cursory allusion to Schelling in Plessner's 1924 treatise *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism*. Before turning to the key passage and the theoretical model to which it alludes, a summary of its context is in order.

The Limits of Community develops a two-pronged polemic against left-wing and right-wing ideologies that seek to supersede the thoroughly mediated framework of modern society in the name of communitarian utopias promising full openness in human relations. Plessner criticizes, on the one hand, left-wing visions of a community premised on a shared "cause" underwritten by reason, and on the other, right-wing utopias of a community of "blood" based on the contingent fact of shared ethnic belonging. From the point of view of Plessner's overarching philosophical project, his most far-reaching diagnostic suggestion is that these rival forms of radicalism represent two sides of the same coin, being complementary symptoms of a false opposition between rational spirit and embodied life (LC: 147; P 5: 94; LC: 191; P 5: 130). Yet Plessner's more fully developed polemic in the treatise turns on another point of criticism. The nub of this criticism is that communitarian utopias are not only impracticable but also and more importantly ethically deleterious. Utopias envisioning "a social system of harmony" would be desirable only if human souls could be reduced to "a complex of appearances" governed by scientifically knowable uniform laws (LC: 158; P 5: 103).

Plessner rejects this vision in the name of human "dignity" (*Würde*), the cornerstone of Western humanism, which would be violated by such standardization. This dignity properly belongs to the human psyche considered in its irreducible individuality and answerability to the universal norms of spirit that govern our expressive, cognitive, and moral pursuits. As Plessner emphasizes in *The Unity of the Senses* as well as *Levels*, the norms constitutive of the *geistig* dimension of human life are

"unreal" because non-factual, deontic, part of our "naturally artificial" second nature (P 3: 42; L: 311; L: 316). These unreal norms become actual through an individual psyche answerable to them that can exercise executive control over the human being's bodily comportments (P 3: 273; LC: 159; P 5: 103). Plessner accordingly argues in *Levels* that the connection between body and soul cannot be properly understood unless we consider the human individual in her engaged commitment to the norms of spirit, such aspiration being integral to what it means to be a person (L: 74–75). This is the most elementary sense in which body, soul, and spirit are interconnected in Plessner's trimorphistic anthropology.

Taking up a Nietzschean theme, Plessner characterizes the individual psyche as a locus of "will to power" (LC: 159; P 5: 103). Yet Plessner gives this idea a paradoxical twist by arguing that the will to power at work in the psyche gives rise to two opposing tendencies that determine the psyche in its epistemological, ethical, and ethical dimensions (P 5: 63–69). As for the epistemological aspect, the psyche strives to be known in a determinate form, yet it also tends to withdraw into latency, clinging to a hidden surfeit of unactualized possibilities. Similarly, an ethical imperative demands self-reflection for the sake of self-mastery, while a countervailing tendency prompts "repression" (P 5: 65) aimed at protecting a naive spontaneity that gives free rein for the plasticity of the psyche to act as the productive wellspring of our determinations. Finally, in an aesthetic respect, the impulse to lend a determinate shape to the psyche is opposed to the need to preserve that mystery about each person's psyche which charges interpersonal relations with allure. In each of these respects, a striving for determinate self-expression clashes with the impulse to withdraw from manifestation so as to protect an inner reserve of potentiality.

Why the psyche should be characterized by such opposing tendencies is a question that will prove decisive for the present argument. For now, we should simply note the ethical implications of this view as they bear upon social life. Plessner's central claim in this regard is that both tendencies must be respected if the dignity of the human person is to be protected. The human person's dignity is tied to her power to reveal her psyche in a determinate form through actions and utterances ventured in the public arena even while she continues to harbor within herself a wealth of unrealized possibilities that cannot be manifested and shared. "Souls," as Plessner declares, "are more than what they actually [*wirklich*] are" (LC: 105; P 5: 59). Far from being only concessions to pragmatic exigencies, the mediating artifices of social life and the dissimulation involved in political power play are ethically indispensable means of protecting this latent wealth.[3] The communities envisioned by radical ideologues, which would mandate total openness in interpersonal relations, would thereby destroy the very basis of human dignity.

This argument participates in a broader intellectual current originating around 1800 that has prompted a variety of thinkers, notably including Schelling and Freud,

[3] A key premise of this defense of the mediating constructs of society and politics will be clarified in *Levels*. As Plessner explains there, the law of "mediated immediacy" that governs the expressive dynamic of human life entails that an act can count as an adequate expression of the individual's inner world even though a gap necessarily remains between its outward result, subject to the laws of the objective sphere, and "a living depth that itself never surfaces" (L: 333).

to try to vindicate the self's freedom and individuality in the face of modern reason's mechanistic and standardizing tendencies by uncovering a spontaneous productivity in the unconscious dimension of the psyche (Ffytche, 2008). Yet Plessner harnesses this recuperative impulse in the service of a modernist affirmation of mediation and artifice (Lethen, 2002). The heart of his argument is found in the fourth chapter of the treatise, about which Plessner writes in the foreword that it contains elements of a "novel" "philosophy of psychic being" whose "detailed justification" he cannot develop here (LC: 42; P 5: 12). Plessner then points readers to *The Unity of the Senses*, published a year earlier, and the work-in-progress that would become *Levels*, suggesting that the topic of the psyche receives a more detailed treatment in the other two works. It is here, in chapter four of *The Limits of Community*, that we find the crucial pointer as to the overall shape of Plessner's philosophical psychology, in the form of a telling formulation: "It follows from the ur-ground character, or better said un-ground character of the psyche [*Aus dem Urgrundcharakter, noch besser sagte man Ungrundcharakter der Psyche*], from its nature as source, that it is more than a mere stream or the freezing of the stream to a solid formation. It is becoming and being in one, for it is simultaneously the genesis of both" (LC: 109; P 5: 62). The "neither-nor" claim here echoes the conclusion of the 1922 article "On Realism in Psychology". Here, however, the negative conjunction does not have an aporetic character. Its proposed explanation turns on the curious concept of "un-ground" (*Ungrund)*.

This term, which in archaic usage meant a bottomless abyss or an absence of reason or justification, played a central role in the theosophy of the early 16th-century Protestant mystic Jakob Böhme (Grimm, 2023). However, Plessner's formulation in the passage now at issue and the broader context hearken back to a later author who adopted the concept from Böhme. In first proposing to identify an "ur-ground" and then immediately correcting this formulation to "un-ground," Plessner repeats almost verbatim a turning point in Schelling's 1809 *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, the so-called *Freiheitsschrift*. At the juncture in question, Schelling borrows Böhme's notion in reference to the primordial "absolute indifference" out of which the self-revelation of the divine absolute proceeds: "how can we call it anything other than the ur-ground, or better yet the un-ground [*wie können wir es anders nennen als den Urgrund oder vielmehr Ungrund*]?" (S: 406). What I propose to show is that the surprisingly precise echo of Schelling in Plessner's invocation of "the ur-ground character, or better said un-ground character of the psyche" is not fortuitous. I will not be arguing that Plessner actually took his guidance from Schelling as he outlined his theory of the psyche in a series of works. For all we know, the allusion just noted may simply reflect Plessner's recognition that the philosophical psychology envisioned as a solution to the puzzle posed by the psyche has an analogue in the conception of the un-ground that Schelling outlined in the 1809 treatise on freedom.[4] Yet even this weaker conjecture provides us with a valuable leading thread for reconstructing Plessner's theory of the psyche.

[4] The echo of Schelling in Plessner's formulation is noted in passing by Haucke (Haucke, 2000: 251). Unlike the interpretation being proposed here, Haucke's remarks on this point do not take into account the fact that the notion of the un-ground is bound up with the conceptual pair ground/existence, and he

Obviously, a single intertextual echo cannot on its own prove that there is a significant connection between Plessner's and Schelling's theories. In the end, my hypothesis will have to be borne out of the exegetical yield that it affords. Even before putting it to such a hermeneutic test, however, we can note some circumstantial evidence in its favor. The fact that Schelling, and specifically the framework developed in his treatise on human freedom, cannot have been far from Plessner's mind as he wrote *The Limits of Community* may be inferred from his characterization of the human being as standing "at the point of indifference between good and evil" (LC: 187; P 5: 127).[5] Whereas this formulation indicates a kinship between Schelling's and Plessner's portrayal of humans' ethical predicament, with respect to the more specific question regarding the ethical significance of politics Schelling's writings from 1809–10 likely provided Plessner with an implicit polemical target. For the powerful current of anti-political sentiment in German culture that Plessner counters with a celebration of politics has found one of its most strident expressions in Schelling's verdict in the *Stuttgart Seminars*, to the effect that the state is "a consequence of the curse that has been placed on humanity" (S: 461). Similarly, the "utopia of nonviolence [*Gewaltlosigkeit*]" that Plessner criticizes in the name of "the duty of power" (LC: 171; P 5: 113) is epitomized by Schelling's wish that cultivation of religious insight might, if "not abolish the state outright," then at least "ensure that the state will progressively divest itself of the blind violence [*Gewalt*] that governs it" (S: 465). It may seem paradoxical that Plessner should base his defense of politics upon a theory of the psyche hearkening back to Schelling, who clearly shared the ingrained German animus towards politics. Yet this strategy fits into a broader effort on Plessner's part that Kai Haucke (2000: 251) described as having the goal of highlighting "civilizatory possibilities in the very kernel of German culture" and thus undercutting the pernicious and false "alternative between German culture and Western civilization".

Yet, more important for the present purposes than these topical echoes of Schelling in *The Limits of Community* is the broader affinity between Schelling's and Plessner's anthropological thinking. Besides points of substantive agreement between their theories of the human, Schelling and Plessner also agree as regards the systematic place of anthropology.[6] Just as Schelling claims that the human spirit is poised at "the limit of nature" (S 446, translation modified) and impelled to exist historically, so Plessner construes the human being as an "apostate of nature" (L: 320) with an inherently historical second nature. In the treatise on freedom, and

Footnote 4 (continued)

does not consider the relevance of this triadic scheme to the arguments about the psyche that Plessner outlines in his other works from the 1920s.

[5] While Schelling, in the works under discussion here, rejects the notion that human freedom involves indifference towards the concrete alternatives we face in the temporal course of our empirical lives, he cannot avoid construing freedom as indifference with respect to our atemporal intelligible character. See his claim in the *Stuttgart Seminars* that man is free "by being placed at the point of indifference" (S: 458). Kosch (2006: 95–98) offers a helpful parsing of this issue.

[6] On points of substantive agreement see Halfwassen (2014). See also Zižek's (1996: 37) framing of Schelling's conception of freedom in terms of the duality between "being" a body and "having" a body, echoing Plessner's well-known dual formula for humans' "eccentric positionality" (LaC: 37; P 7: 241).

even more explicitly in the *Stuttgart Seminars*, Schelling envisions anthropology as the culmination of the philosophy of nature (S: 457).[7] Plessner for his part argues already in *The Unity of the Senses* that philosophical anthropology, insofar as it considers humans' bodily lives as geared towards the normative orientations underlying our cultural practices, must be framed by a theory of living nature that complements the disenchanted perspective of natural-scientific explanation by interpreting the structures of intelligible sense involved in organic life (P 3: 72; P 3: 268).

When Plessner announces this project in *The Unity of the Senses* under the heading of "German philosophy of nature" (P 3: 73), he thereby aligns it with the 19th-century tradition of *Naturphilosophie* whose most prominent proponent was Schelling. By the time *The Limits of Community* is published, Plessner already anticipates in its foreword the book outlining his theory of living nature, with the working title "Plant, Animal, Human: Elements of a Cosmology of Living Form". The epigraph to *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*, the book that was to emerge from this project, is an excerpt from a letter from Alexander von Humboldt, the foremost natural scientist of the age, who would go on to author *Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe*. The addressee of the letter is none other than Schelling, whose *Naturphilosophie* recently incurred harsh criticism for allegedly obstructing the progress of scientific investigation into nature.[8] In his letter, Humboldt assures Schelling that he regards his own empirical investigations and Schelling's speculative *Naturphilosophie* as complementary undertakings–a precedent that Plessner evidently considered important enough that he prefaced his book with its evocation. Plessner's indebtedness to Schelling is likewise implicit in his tribute to "Goethe and his contemporaries' view of nature" (L: 24) in the opening chapter of *Levels*. As late as 1954, Plessner would characterize Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* in terms that bring out its affinity with his own nature-philosophical project in *Levels* (P 9: 314–319). As we will see, the line of thought in which Schelling deploys the notion of un-ground directly implicates his philosophy of nature; and, in much the same way, the theory of the psyche whose key idea Plessner encapsulates in the concept of un-ground is intelligible only in the context of his nature-philosophical framework.

The Schellingian Model

Having reviewed some of the evidence for Schelling's importance for Plessner, we must now ask why Plessner should view Schelling as a precursor in his effort to make sense of the puzzling fact that idealism and realism about the psyche each capture an aspect of this Janus-faced region of reality. The most plausible answer has to do with one of Schelling's abiding concerns throughout his long and varied career,

[7] Theunissen (1965) argues that the predominance of the anthropological perspective distinguishes Schelling's approach in the treatise on freedom from the transcendental-philosophical approach of his earlier and the "ontotheological" approach of his late writings.

[8] See Schelling's January 1805 letter to Alexander to Humboldt and Humboldt's reply of 1 February 1805 (SB: 47–50).

namely, the ambition to provide idealism with a realist complement. Thus, around 1800, Schelling envisions a complementary relation between transcendental idealism, which deduces objectivity from the conditions of possibility of self-consciousness, and the philosophy of nature, which reconstructs the emergence of a free, self-conscious subject out of living nature. Similarly, Schelling's late work is premised on the insight that the "negative philosophy" of idealism, concerned with what is thinkable at all, must be complemented with a "positive philosophy" that acknowledges the primacy of being before all thought. Written between these two poles of Schelling's career, on the threshold of a middle period devoted to the so-called Ages of the World project, the 1809 treatise on human freedom summarizes Schelling's guiding thought as follows: "Spinoza's realism is … as abstract as the idealism of Leibniz. Idealism is the soul of philosophy; realism is the body; only both together can constitute a living whole" (S: 356).

The relevance of this Schellingian aspiration to Plessner's enterprise is not immediately obvious. In keeping with his general preference for sidestepping traditional metaphysical questions, Plessner rarely positions himself with respect to the debate between idealists and realists. Whenever he does, however, he too stakes out a hybrid position. Thus, in *Laughing and Crying*, Plessner argues that the human being's constitutively "ambiguous" attitude towards her own body gives rise to "powerful motives and arguments for the idealistic as well as the realistic theories of consciousness or nature," resulting in an irresolvable antinomy (L: 36; P 7: 240f.). Each person occupies a standpoint within her body that constitutes "an absolute focal reference of all things in the environment," such that things are revealed to me only "in relation to me as a central 'I'". This fact accounts for the appeal of idealism, and in particular subjective idealism. However, the human being can and indeed must also consider things from a standpoint of reflective detachment from her body. When I thus "give up this absolute focal reference in favor of the relative localization of all things, including my body (together with my consciousness)," the objective framework of the world finally retains its "preponderance" (*Übergewicht*) over the individual's subjectivity, making realism attractive. The two stances are interdependent in human life: certainty of myself as a self "within" the "lived body" (*Leib*) controlled by me and certainty of myself as a physical body (*Körper*) among other other physical objects in the world reciprocally presuppose one another (L: 149; 7: 373). Human life is thus the ongoing, precariously lived reconciliation between idealism and realism. There is a sense in which an idealism of the non-subjective, Hegelian type finally gains the upper hand in Plessner's *Levels*, for the objective totality of the world turns out to presuppose the shared horizon of intelligibility of spirit (L: 304–305). However, Plessner's reworking of the Hegelian conception remains in tension with the realist premise of his undertaking to interpret the human being as a distinctive form of organic life embedded in nature. This is not the place to explore the tension in question and its consequences for Plessner's overarching project.[9] Yet I hope to have established a broad reason why Schelling's ambition to combine realism and idealism should appeal to Plessner.

[9] I do so in some detail in a work-in-progress.

Let us now examine how Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* develops this conjunction by deploying the notion of un-ground that Plessner would invoke in *The Limits of Community*. The theoretical framework elaborated in the *Freiheitsschrift* and its more systematic reformulation in the *Stuttgart Seminars* differ from Schelling's earlier works in a crucial respect, for both texts recur to figures of thought drawn from 17 and 18th-century Christian theosophy and, indirectly, Lurianic Kabbalah. Schelling's guiding thought is the following: if we want to construe the absolute as more than a mere ideal construct, if we want to grasp it as something real, then we need to think of it as a living, self-forming, self-revealing divine person. Of chief interest here is the basic structure of personhood as it emerges in Schelling's argument. Schelling develops this structure with primary reference to the divine person, yet since all finite created things, humans included, inherit it from God, we can in a first approach set aside the difference between divine and finite personhood.

The crux of Schelling's conception of personhood is the distinction between "existence" and "ground," which he metaphorically aligns with the contrast between the expansive movement of light and the contracting pull of gravity, or between centrifugal and centripetal force–and, crucially for us, with the duality of ideality and reality. More abstractly put, the existence/ground distinction can be thought of as capturing the difference between *who* I am and the fact *that* I am at all–or, in terms employed in the *Stuttgart Seminars* that anticipate Heidegger's ontological difference, between the person considered as a determinately knowable being (*Seiendes*), and the Being (*Sein*) of beings, which is not itself a being (S: 435f.). A person's existence is the manner in which she steps forth into the light, revealing herself in a form intelligible to both others and herself, as having a fully actualized and determinate identity. In the case of the divine person, existence takes the form of the revelation of a universal *logos*. This is the ideal aspect of personhood: that is, the person revealing herself in her determinate identity, as she can be known and represented by others or in self-reflection. By contrast, the real ground of personhood is that in virtue of which I *am* at all, a dense, opaque, and mute kernel of selfhood that perpetually withdraws from being known. The ground of personhood is that in us which is not up to us because it is simply given and hence nature-like. Schelling underlines the material character of this ground. At issue here, however, is not the *natura naturata* of matter defined in terms of extension and inertia, whose movements the physics can explain in terms of causal laws, but a kind of *natura naturans*. For Schelling construes the matter constitutive of the ground as restless "yearning" (*Sehnsucht*) that seeks its intelligible object, harboring an infinitude of unactualized and incompossible potentialities (S: 359).

We can give a handy approximation of Schelling's underlying thought, one that highlights his anticipation of Freudian psychoanalysis, by saying that the basis of the self-conscious, rational Ego is the irrational Id. To put the matter in more conceptually nuanced terms, Schelling drives a wedge between the modal category of actuality and the ontological category of reality. Idealism equates actuality with ideality, a thought epitomized by Hegel's famous *Doppelsatz* ("What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational"). Schelling would not dispute this equation. Yet he adds the complementary insight that the reality of an entity, the contingent fact that it happens to *be*, cannot be straightforwardly equated with its rationally determinable

actuality, for it rests on a material ground containing possibilities that have remained unactualized on account of their deficient rationality.[10] With respect to personhood, this means that my ideal aspect is my manifest actualization, the intelligible form in which I determine myself in self-reflection as well as through actions and utterances in the public arena. Yet that by virtue of which I am more than the ideal construct of a determinate identity is the ground that harbors my unactualized possibilities.[11] It is in virtue of this incommunicable kernel of selfhood, which contains an excess of potentiality, that I am, above and beyond my actual and determinate qualities, myself. This is the dark background from which I step forth in order to determine myself, and which may not be dissolved by the light of existence if the latter is to be more than an arbitrary construct. Without this ground, the one who reveals herself in deeds, words, and determinate qualities would not be a person endowed with selfhood, indeed could not be said to *be* at all.

If the person *qua* existing must step forth from the ground, where does the ground come from? This question arises in a particularly acute form with respect to the one entity that is not created, namely, God. It is to answer this question that Schelling recurs to the concept of the "un-ground". In keeping with his unapologetically anthropomorphizing approach to the divine absolute, Schelling takes his guidance from an insight into human infancy. What precedes the formation of a mature human person is an inchoate, undifferentiated awareness. Personality formation begins when the individual freely and self-consciously determines herself as a determinate someone and excludes from this self-definition all that is unconscious and nature-like in her (S: 433–434). Likewise, what precedes the self-revelation of the divine absolute is a state that is "indifferent" with respect to the ground/existence distinction and therefore contains the possibility of both (S: 407). This primordial indifference is what Schelling terms the un-ground. It is, to be sure, not in time that the divine un-ground precedes the ground and existence. In fact, in the *Stuttgart Seminars* Schelling proposes that temporality originates in the divine act that disrupts the indifference of the un-ground and differentiates God's ground, thereby defined as something temporally prior, from his existence, which thereby becomes something subsequent to the ground (S: 428–431). The duality between God's contraction into a real ground of "egotism," his unconscious material nature, and his self-revelation in the ideal universality of *logos* thus becomes a temporal progression from the former to the latter.

Since, however, the divine absolute must ultimately reveal itself as identical with itself, the distinction between the real ground and ideal existence must be followed by a third stage that reveals the latent presence of the latter within the former (S:

[10] Hence Schelling's striking claim about moral evil and bodily disease: although these possibilities are internally contradictory and hence cannot attain actuality in the proper sense, they can nevertheless become a "monstrous reality" (S: 437).

[11] As Buchheim points out in his editorial commentary (Schelling, 2011: 113), Schelling's ground should not be conflated with the Leibnizian idea of sufficient ground. Although the ground makes the determinacy of existence possible, it contains a wealth of alternative possibilities besides the ones contingently actualized in existence. The ground at issue is thus a necessary but not sufficient ground of existence. On the emergence of Schelling's conception of the ground through sustained grappling with the Leibnizian principle of sufficient reason see Buchheim (1996).

440–441; Theunissen, 1965: 182–183n.). This transfiguration of the ground occurs through the creation of finite things. According to Schelling's cosmogony, God *qua* existing forms the matter of his ground so as to actualize the anticipation of ideality in the inchoate yearning that constitutes the matter of his ground. By "awakening" the intelligible form latent in the matter drawn from the ground, God ensouls matter–soul being in Schelling's Aristotelian conception the form of the living–and thus makes matter take shape as a finite creature.

Here we should note an element of the cosmogony sketched in the *Freiheitsschrift* that anticipates the nature-philosophical framework of Plessner's theory of the human. Schelling claims that the ascending levels of living nature are characterized by a progressively greater degree of separation between the diverse bodily powers and appetites of the living being, descended from the restless matter of the divine ground, and the coordinating soul, which acts as the placeholder of divine *logos* (S: 362). Towards the lower end of this ascending series (Schelling uses the theologically loaded example of the snake), the soul regulating the life of the living being operates in an "inalterable" fusion with its bodily powers and appetites (S: 372). Schelling contrasts this inalterable fusion in lower living beings with the "complete development of the auxiliary organs" in higher animals, "which has reached its highest point in man," and which "already suggests the will's independence from desires or a relation of centrum and periphery that is really the only healthy one, since the former has stepped back into its freedom and sobriety, having removed itself from what is simply (peripheral or) instrumental" (S: 376n.). In humans alone, the soul acts as a "ruling" "center" that has not just partially but indeed completely detached itself from the "periphery" animated by the living being's powers and appetites. Due to its detachment, the human soul is free *either* to rule over the egotistic appetites deriving from the ground, using them as instruments of the universal *logos–or*, in the perversion that constitutes evil, to subordinate the soul's rationality to the egotistic appetites of the periphery. By virtue of this freedom, the human soul is "spirit," a principle poised at a point of decision between "both centra"–between, on the one hand, the ideal principle of the soul itself in its proper role of grasping and following universal *logos*, and on the other, the real principle, derived from the divine ground, that manifests itself in the egotistic appetites of the bodily periphery (S: 363).[12] This is why Schelling claims that God's self-revelation through creation is consummated in the human being. The union between ideal existence and real ground, which is inalterably fixed and therefore merely implicit in God and non-human finite beings, becomes problematic, explicitly experienceable, and hence fully revealed in the freedom of the human creature (S: 364).

Only a year after the publication of the *Freiheitsschrift*, in the *Stuttgart Seminars* Schelling rearticulates this theory in a less extravagantly metaphorical and more systematic form. The intricacies of this system need not concern us here. One of its

[12] Halfwassen (2014: 249) finds an anticipation of Plessner's theory of eccentric positionality in Schelling's claim that the human being "can go astray from his proper essence". Yet Plessner's morally neutral theory of eccentric positionality precludes the very idea of a moral vocation grounded in a metaphysically conceived human essence. What Schelling's *Freiheitschrift* does anticipate, in the argument about the relation between bodily center and periphery, is Plessner's conception of central organization and centric positionality, of which eccentricity is a radically transformed variant (L: 291).

branches, however, has a direct bearing on the present argument. In keeping with the conception of spirit introduced in the treatise on freedom, Schelling maintains in the *Stuttgart Seminars* that the human mind, or *Geist* in the broad sense, comprises three powers that correspond, respectively, to God's real ground, the ideality of the divine *logos*, and the identity-in-difference between the two. The mind's real power, which "communicates with nature" and only obscurely intimates ideality, is "temperament" (*Gemüt*, S: 465). The mind's ideal power, the impersonal principle by virtue of which the mind grasps the ideal, universal *logos,* is the "soul" (*Seele*). Poised between these two polar powers is the medial power that Schelling terms "spirit," *Geist,* in the narrow sense. So understood, spirit is the principle of personal freedom, by virtue of which each individual must choose between subordinating his temperament to the *logos* of the soul or the other way around.

We will be able to appreciate the relevance of this triadic framework to Plessner's philosophical psychology if we note a potentially confusing terminological difference. Whereas Schelling employs the concept of spirit to designate the individual dimension of mind and that of the soul to refer to its transindividual aspect, the two terms are switched around in Plessner's philosophical anthropology, which draws on and reworks Hegel's conception of spirit as a socially shared normative framework (L: 305). This terminological difference notwithstanding, we will see that Plessner too envisions the personal aspect of the mind as existing in a persistent tension between the mind's real, natural ground and its ideal, transpersonal pole.

Plessner's Philosophical Psychology Reconstructed

To recall, it has been our guiding hypothesis that Plessner's reference to "the unground character of the psyche" signals his recognition that the layout of the philosophical psychology he envisions as a solution to the puzzle of the psyche is analogous to that of Schelling's theory. We can accordingly use the Schellingian template as a key to the underlying unity of seemingly disparate arguments about the psyche that Plessner developed in several works from the 1920s. In light of this template, we will see that Plessner too gives an account of the real, natural ground of the psyche, an account of its ideal existence, and he too points to something like an unground giving rise to both. Plessner, however, transposes Schelling's triadic framework to an austerely, albeit not reductively, naturalistic key. We can immediately note an important consequence of this transposition if we recall that Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* metaphorically likens the philosophical theory combining idealism and realism to a living whole comprising soul and body. In Plessner's reworking of the Schellingian model, the relation between soul and body is no longer just a metaphor. Rather, the psychophysical nexus becomes the crux of a new philosophical psychology that construes the psyche after the model of the Schellingan triad of ground, existence, and un-ground.

Let us begin, then, by identifying the equivalent of Schelling's ground in Plessner's theory of the psyche. The relevant train of thought can be found in *The Unity of the Senses*, in the chapter dealing with the so-called "lower" sensory modalities of

the human body, which Plessner distinguishes from the higher modalities of seeing and hearing (P 3: 267–274; P 3:285–287). Lumped together by Plessner under the rubric of "conditional [*zuständliche*] modalities," touch, taste, smell, proprioception, interoception, sense of balance, and sense of temperature typically do not deliver data for intentional consciousness directed at objective states of affairs. Rather, the main task of conditional sensations is to register the living body's state with an immediacy that precludes intentional awareness, and in a hedonically valenced (i.e., pleasurable or displeasurable) way that maintains the body in a "state of excitation" (*Erregtheit*, P 3: 272).[13] It is due to the excitatory, animating effect of conditional sensations that the human organism is not only a spatially extended "physical body" (*Körper*) but also a more or less aroused "lived body" (*Leib*) whose occurrent states are felt and appraised in "lived experiences" (*Erlebnisse*) and therefore matter to the living being as its own states. Here Plessner recalls William James's and Carl Lange's researches showing that psychological states are always "embedded" in bodily sensations (P 3: 272). This finding lends support to Plessner's claim that the conditional modalities have the function of ensouling, or "psychizing," the body by endowing it with the inwardness of lived experiencing (P 3: 271). Borrowing a Heideggerian term, we might say that conditional sensations constitute the sense of "mineness" proper to the lived body. Since the reality of the lived body as it is felt in conditional sensations constitutes the constant "background" (*Hintergrund*) from which the inner realm of the psyche can be detached, Plessner concludes that the human body's conditional sensations constitute "the background of the soul" (P 3: 286). The implied analogy to the relation between background and figure is part and parcel of the same mystical imagery originally elaborated by Jacob Böhme from which Schelling borrowed the paired concepts of ground and existence (Largier, 2022: 187–199).

This account of the real bodily ground of the psyche should not be misunderstood as entailing its eliminative reduction to bodily states. On the contrary, Plessner views the psyche as "a manifold with a style of its own that can be detached from this background" (P 3: 286). This detachment constitutes the psyche as a distinct and determinate region of reality. To put the matter in terms of the Schellingian template guiding our reconstruction, the detachment of the psyche from the background of conditional sensations constitutes its existence, the way in which it steps forth from its ground. For an account of this detachment, we must turn to the argument about the psyche in *Levels*, which is couched in a theory of the "eccentric positionality" distinctive to the human life form. Since Plessner construes eccentricity as a radically transformed modification of the "centric positionality" of higher, centrally organized animals (L: 291), we must first review what he means by the latter.

The first point to note here is that Plessner's account of centricity can be understood as refining Schelling's insight regarding the relation between center and periphery in bodily life. Similarly to Schelling, Plessner contrasts the "decentralized" organization of lower animals with higher animals' "centralized" organization. Unlike the former, the latter allows for a differentiation between the

[13] On the role of evaluative affects in the lives of higher animals and humans, as construed by Plessner, see Dornbach (2023).

sensorimotorically engaged bodily periphery, termed the "lived body" (*Leib*), and the central organ that supports a self tasked with coordinating sensory and motor functions of the lived body. This organizational form determines higher animals' distinctive "positionality," by which term Plessner means the way in which a living being not only occupies a portion of space but "claims" its place and bears a relation to it. Centrally organized animals are characterized by centric positionality, for they confront their surroundings out of a self that functions as the absolute center of experiences disclosing a perspectival "environment" (*Umwelt*) composed of biologically relevant features. This is obviously true of humans as well. In light of *Levels*, the theory of the conditional modalities presented in *The Unity of the Senses* can be understood as identifying a key condition of centric positionality. The self-supported by the central organ is constituted in the inwardness of lived experiencing, which is in turn anchored in the lived body's conditional sensations.

Given, however, that countless animal species possess a repertoire of conditional modalities similar to ours, we must wonder why in the human life alone the self in the focal point of lived experiences should consolidate into a distinct region of reality–or put another way, why the conditional sensations of humans, but not those of animals, should form a "background" from which the psyche detaches itself. We can arrive at an answer to this question if we consider Plessner's suggestion that humans' eccentric positionality represents a radically transformed variant of the centric positionality of higher animals (L: 291). Similarly to higher animals, humans experience their lives out of a central self that controls the lived body confronting a perspectival environment. However, unique to the human form of life is the capacity for stepping back from this centric standpoint and to relate to one's own body, and the self coordinating its life process, from a virtual vantage point outside one's bodily boundaries.

Two consequences of this uniquely human characteristic are decisive in the present context. First, since the human being relates to her bodily life from a virtual position outside her bodily boundaries, she not only forms representations of what is outside her but also represents the locus of this experiencing as a region of reality distinguished from the outside, "the inner world, the world 'in' the lived body, that which the living being is" (L: 295). Plessner writes:

> To the human, the transition from being within his own lived body to existing outside of his lived body is the irreducible dual aspect of existence, a true split in his nature. He lives on both sides of this split as body and psyche and as the psychophysically neutral unity of these two spheres. (L: 292)

The duality of body and soul is thus neither a disjunction between two substances defined by mutually exclusive attributes (say, extension and thinking). Nor is it a merely apparent, epiphenomenal difference. Rather, we are here dealing with a real "dual aspectivity" engendered by the overarching life process of an eccentrically positioned organism.

The second relevant consequence of eccentric positionality is elucidated by Plessner through an anthropological reworking of Hegel's conception of "spirit" (*Geist*, L: 303–305). A living being characterized by eccentric positionality participates in a

social framework of reciprocal recognition, a "shared world" (*Mitwelt*) in which we can, and indeed must, consider things, including ourselves, with the eyes of others. It is only on this social horizon of intelligibility that an intersubjectively available objective sphere, not reducible to any individual's consciousness of it, can come into view at all. The structure of both the outer and the inner world is determined by the fact that we are centrically positioned, but in an eccentric way that involves mediation by the sociality of spirit. With respect to the outer world, humans, much like other centrally organized animals, inhabit environments defined by their pragmatic needs. Yet humans can, and indeed must, also see beyond these perspectival environments and envision the objectivity of the world outside their bodies. Likewise, the inner world of the psyche has a centric pole, in which we simply "undergo" (*durchmachen*) psychological contents, and an eccentric pole in which we adopt an attitude of "having" and intentional purport toward such contents (P 5: 190). The centric pole consists in the succession of lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*), which are–as we know from *The Unity of the Senses*–subjective, perspectival states given first-personally, anchored in conditional sensations of the lived body: states of "desiring, thinking, doing, feeling" (L: 292). Yet a living being capable of eccentric self-consciousness is never entirely captivated by the subjectivity of the perspectival lived experiences presenting to its centric self but is always capable of turning that self into an object of reflection. Since our centric positionality is subject to an eccentric and *geistig* modification, we attribute our subjectively undergone lived experiences to an inner region of objectivity, namely, the psyche. This is the inner region of reality of which lived experiences are merely phenomenal manifestations, and which cannot be reduced to our awareness of it.

Plessner's conception of the psyche is dispositional, for he defines the psyche as an "antecedently given reality of dispositions" (L: 296) that comprises "one's character, one's temperament, a bad or good inclination" (E: 190). His thought seems to be that the psyche consists of an individualized repertoire of dispositions to certain types of lived experience: desires, thoughts, impulses, affective evaluations, and so on. So understood, the psyche is not a substance separate from the body. Rather, the psyche is the body's characteristic repertoire of experiential dispositions, an individualized dispositional profile that can figure as a determinate object of my own and others' representations.

In the focal point of my lived experiences and the conditional sensations grounding them stands the centrically positioned self in its perspectival subjectivity and inwardness. The psyche, then, is the centric self insofar as it figures in eccentric self-consciousness, in the context of which it can be represented as a determinate objective reality that is not reducible to its phenomenal presentations in lived experiencing. Put otherwise, the psyche is the self-identified with a more or less stable repertoire of individual dispositions. Although a person's first-personal access to her own psyche is uniquely intimate, nevertheless the psyche constitutes a reality that is in principle knowable by others, albeit for the most part only in indirect and tentative ways. Similarly to the objectivity of the outer world, the psyche too is ideal in the transcendental sense, that is, insofar as its objectivity presupposes the spirit's shared horizon of intelligibility (L: 304). Far from being a mere construct of thought, however, the psyche is an ideal construct based upon a real ground. In much the same

way as the ideal determinacy of existence steps forth from the indeterminacy of the ground in Schelling's conception of personality, the ideal objectivity of the psyche becomes detached from the real background of lived experiences anchored in the body's conditional sensations.[14]

How does this detachment occur? Part of the answer to this question transpires from a major treatise on understanding other minds that Plessner co-authored with animal psychologist F. J. J. Buytendijk in 1924. As Plessner and Buytendijk argue, our default understanding of the "comportment" (*Verhalten*) of animals and fellow humans is "psychophysically indifferent" (P 7: 122f.). In our naive, "natural" rapport with other animate beings, we immediately grasp their meaningful directedness towards their surroundings (their "environmental intentionality") in a way that is neutral with respect to the soul-body distinction. We see a hunting animal, or a child playing, not a body or a soul engaged in these pursuits. However, it is a "law of the human sphere" that we must seek to understand the acts, utterances, and attitudes of our fellow humans as "manifestations of a real I" (P 7: 123). In human interactions, the naive and natural, psychophysically neutral understanding of comportment becomes the starting point for a specifically psychological interpretation that seeks to grasp "the character, the motives, the psychic inducements 'in' the other person"–a form of interpretation that is always to some extent "artifical, scientific," although constitutive of human sociality (P 7: 124). Plessner reiterates this point in *Levels*, where he writes that, even though we possess a naive, pre-theoretical certainty that our fellow humans entertain conscious comportments towards their surroundings, nevertheless another person's inner world, being "hidden from me," "can only be uncovered by very different kinds of interpretation" (L: 301).

While Plessner and Buytendijk do not elaborate on the "law of the human sphere" that requires us to interpret our fellow humans in this psychological manner, we can infer its basis from the theory of eccentric positionality outlined in *Levels.* Since an eccentrically positioned being lives at a reflective distance from her own body, biologically hard-wired instincts are not sufficient for keeping her oriented and need to be supplemented with norms, in conformity with which she can lead her life: human life "is always breaking apart into nature and spirit, bondage and freedom, is and ought" (L: 317). The recognitive social framework of spirit that supports an eccentrically positioned living being is therefore also an essentially normative sphere. This means that we must view each human person, ourselves included, not just as an animal organism confronting a perspectival environment but also as a self-conscious and self-determining subject–that is, as an individual center of responsibility answerable to intersubjectively binding norms. We interpret the behavior of each person as expressive of an accountable and determinately committed psyche, which

[14] Since the ideality of the psyche presupposes spirit's horizon of intelligibility, the relation between the psyche's real bodily ground and its ideal existence has a counterpart in the relation between the natural, organic infrastructure of human life and its *geistig,* normative superstructure. Recall that the term "existence" bears an etymological reference to standing, and consider Plessner's distinction between the shared world of spirit and its "specific ground in life [*Lebensgrund*]": whereas the body and the soul pertain to the human being "because he is them and lives them," spirit is "the sphere by virtue of which we live as persons. It is where we stand [*in der wir stehen*], precisely because our form of positionality sustains it" (L: 304).

is detached from bodily life and able to exert control over it, and whose more or less stable set of dispositions constitutes an individual character.

In the context of a person's self-relation, this means that my representations of my psyche do not merely reflect the deliverances of introspection but also, and indeed often in the first place, serve and express a normatively guided commitment to fostering certain dispositional character traits (motivations, emotions, ways of thinking, etc.). In addition to their epistemic role, my psychological self-representations also play an ethical role as means of self-formation, of "making up my mind".[15] They allow me to critically evaluate the repertoire of dispositions that currently constitute my psyche and, if need be, enable me to reshape these dispositions so as to actualize another possible psychological character (Lindemann, 2017: 168). In sum, the psyche becomes detached from the background of conditional sensations through an inward, self-reflective turn of consciousness that constitutes and cognizes the individual's centric self *as* a psyche–in other words, as a determinate, characteristic, and normatively regulated repertoire of dispositions which is not just an epiphenomenon of bodily processes but a construct for which the individual can be held accountable.

This brings us to a crucial matter introduced in the section titled "The Clue: Plessner's Allusion to Schelling's Un-Ground," namely, the psyche's place in Plessner's trimorphistic anthropology. To recall, Plessner maintains that the psyche in its individuality enables the deontic and hence "unreal" norms of spirit to gain traction in bodily life (P 3: 273; LC: 159; P 5: 103). We can specify how the conditional sensations that form the real ground of the psyche contribute to this mediating function. Owing to their evaluative, hedonically valenced character, conditional senses have an excitatory, motivating effect (P 3: 272). They thus constitute the lived body as a locus of mattering, concern, and striving, in which conformity or non-conformity to norms can be at issue at all. Without the evaluative and excitatory role played by the body's conditional sensations, the human form of life could involve no normative point of view, no possibility of concern for, and engaged commitment to, the norms of spirit. Such *geistig* norms as objectivity and morality could not gain traction in our embodied behavior if conditional sensations did not make our bodily lives susceptible to evaluation and capable of motivated action.

Yet susceptibility to evaluation is not yet answerability to norms, even though it is a necessary condition of the latter. As already noted, countless non-human animal species are endowed with the inwardness of lived experiencing, anchored in hedonically valenced conditional sensations. Indeed, Plessner goes so far as to claim that animals with a centralized organization have a self that coordinates their

[15] This is Moran's (2001: 36–65) felicitous phrase for the role of self-constitution in self-knowledge. This strand of Plessner's philosophical psychology, which corresponds to Schelling's existence (as opposed to the ground), has an affinity with Kant's conception of the soul as interpreted by Kraus (2022: 504–508). Kraus argues that Kant offers an alternative to both Cartesian dualism and materialism by construing the notion of soul as a regulative idea of reason that defines the very object of inner experience, i.e., the psychological person, characterized by "a qualitative identity, which consists in the formation of a consistent character that is stable through time" (Kraus, 2022: 506). The normative implication of the Kantian conception is that "the idea of the soul is practically efficacious in striving towards self-perfection according to the ideal of mental wholeness" (Kraus, 2022: 507). Unlike the Kantian conception, however, Plessner's theory of the psyche, as reconstructed here, construes the psyche's ideal existence as rooted in its real bodily ground.

sensorimotor functions (L: 232). However, since animals lack the eccentric ability "to step back, to rise above their own condition, above the way they feel [*Zumutesein*], above the character of that which they undergo," their inwardness does not consolidate into a region of reality that can figure as an intentional object of representation; as Plessner puts the matter, animals "are soul but they do not have a soul [*sie sind Seele, aber sie haben keine Seele*]" (E: 190). The human being, by contrast, not only "is a soul" but also "has a soul" as an object of thematic self-consciousness, a difference due to "the spiritual [*geistigen*] anchoring of the human" (LC: 115; P 5: 68). From the background of humans' lived experiencing, constituted as it is in conditional sensations of the body, the psyche becomes detached. The centric self in the focus of lived experiences thus becomes an object of (my and others') psychological representation: that is, an entity characterized by a normatively regulated, and hence more or less stable repertoire of dispositions, whose reality cannot be reduced to anyone's awareness of it. It is only in this way if it is posited as a transcendentally ideal object of the inner world–in a word, as a psyche–that the self can be subject to self-reflection and normatively answerable self-determination.

The framework outlined above reflects the structural similarity established by Plessner between the objectivity of the outer and that of the inner world. However, no less important for Plessner than this homology between the two spheres is the difference between them, something overlooked by empiricist psychologists who misconstrue the inner world as exactly analogous to the outer one (L: 299). Our attitudes towards the outer world move along a spectrum between centric absorption in perspectival environments and eccentric detachment that allows the objectivity of the outer world to come into view (L: 296). The intersubjectively available objective reality of the outer world remains unaffected by such shifts in the consciousness of an individual observer. As Plessner points out, it is otherwise with the inner world, for its objective pole belongs to the same inner region of reality as the acts of consciousness that bring it into view. In becoming conscious, a given psychological content may be transformed. As Plessner puts it, "the gaze of the experiencing subject can cause its inner life to change as dramatically as light affects the sensitive layer of a photographic plate" (L: 297). Indeed, as previously noted, it is precisely for the sake of such transformations that we deploy certain psychological self-representations in the context of our normatively guided self-formation. Plessner sums up this complex state of affairs by noting that the inner world involves not only a spectrum between subjective attitudes of centric involvement and eccentric detachment but also, on the correlative objective side, a "spectrum of being" (L: 296). On one end of this spectrum are psychological contents that we consciously undergo and which become transformed through our representations. On its other end, we find repressed contents that lie in wait as discrete things whose manifestations can surprise us. The instability of our eccentric self-relation accounts for the puzzling Janus-faced character of psychological reality, its fluctuation between thing-like discreteness and streaming movement, as described in the 1922 article "On Realism in Psychology" (P 9: 40). Indeed the section on the inner world in *Levels* repeats verbatim the passage from the 1922 essay that sets out this ambiguity, and which we reviewed in the section on "Idealism Versus Realism About the Psyche"; only this time the ambiguity no longer seems puzzling.

A clear upshot of this line of thought is the rejection of idealist, and in particular, Neo-Kantian views that equate psychological being with the way in which it presents in the consciousness of its bearer. These views cannot account for the fact that a psychological content can be a "reality" that "extends beyond me, seizes me, moves me" and which "can be read off my face" even when I am unaware of it (E: 185). Yet the empiricist view that construes the psyche after the model of the outer world is equally one-sided. It overlooks what Plessner calls the "privilege" that I enjoy in relation to my psyche insofar as "I alone have primary access" to its contents, and I alone am in a position to undergo my lived experiences (E: 185). Unlike external objects, psychological contents can be transformed by registering in our consciousness. The concepts and norms that we bring to bear upon our lived experiences partly shape their character and may even reconfigure the experiential dispositions that make up our psychological character. Unlike the outer world, the psyche is a sphere of reality whose contents "both determine and are determined by lived experience" (L: 296), and which we can therefore "both discover and reshape" (L: 297).

Plessner's philosophical anthropology suggests an illuminating explanation for the plasticity that distinguishes the psyche from other regions of reality. The organic constitution of an eccentrically positioned living being is constitutively incomplete and underdetermined. In most areas of human life, therefore, bodily drives whose aims were biologically fixed in animal life undergo a "dedifferentiation," coalescing into a free-floating excess of drive that can find an outlet in any number of directions (L XVII–XVIII: 309–321). This may be viewed as a naturalistic account of what Schelling describes as the objectless yearning of the ground. Because this free-floating drive threatens to leave us without orientation in our lives, it needs to be stabilized by means of various cultural constructs, including notably norms and concepts that support a determinate normative self-understanding of the human individual. This is why our psychological self-representations can go beyond descriptive knowledge and serve as means of self-formation. If, moreover, we equate the real ground of the psyche with the inwardness of the lived body that experiences and evaluates its own states in conditional sensations, then the reconstruction being proposed here entails that a person's conceptually mediated consciousness of her own psyche can alter her characteristic dispositions to undergo certain types of bodily experience. This accounts for psychosomatic disorders and their possible resolution through various forms of psychotherapy. With respect to both the ordinary forms of self-formation and its institutionalized form in psychotherapy, it follows from the conception reconstructed here that the real, bodily ground of the psyche is always pregnant with possibilities that remain unactualized in the publicly expressed, determinate actuality of our psychological being. Conversely, a person's publicly manifested psychological identity–the ideal existence of her psyche–will always tend to restrict the range of actualizations based on the possibilities latent in the psyche's real bodily ground.

The elements of Plessner's philosophical psychology reviewed up until this point can now be summarized in Schelling's terms. The real, natural ground of the psyche can be found in the centric pole of our inner world–that is, in the lived body's hedonically valenced conditional sensations, which anchor the peculiar "mineness"

of our lived experiences. The correlative ideal existence of the psyche is the eccentric pole of the inner world: namely, the centric self posited as an inner object whose determinacy presupposes spirit's social and normative horizon of intelligibility. Thus far, however, we have ignored the very concept used by Schelling that Plessner borrows in *The Limits of Community*. There, as we may recall, Plessner referred to "the un-ground character of the psyche," by which he meant the fact that the psyche "is more than a mere stream or the freezing of the stream to a solid formation. It is becoming and being in one, for it is simultaneously the genesis of both" (LC: 109; P 5: 62). Given the arguments reviewed thus far, Plessner's formulation would seem to imply that the psyche constitutes the common origin of its own real bodily ground and its ideal existence. This idea may sound implausible, for ordinary ways of thinking tend to encourage the dualistic view according to which the reality of the body, as it is experienced in conditional sensations, is simply a brute fact. It should be readily apparent from the above considerations why this view is false.

Indeed, as we saw in the section titled "The Clue: Plessner's Allusion to Schelling's Un-Ground," already in *The Limits of Community* Plessner maintained that the naturalness of the psyche's real ground was something we had to actively protect, making it a case of partially artificial naturalness. The psyche was said to have an inherent tendency to withdraw from disclosure and being known, so as to preserve a wealth of potentialities in excess of its determinate manifestations in the social arena. When Plessner first outlined the psyche's conflicting propensities for self-disclosure and self-concealment in *The Limits of Community*, he was not yet in a position to explain this self-contradictory dynamic. Its explanation emerges on the final pages of *Levels*, where Plessner revisits the topic of psychological reality in the light of humans' eccentric positionality.

This crucial line of thought suggests that our eccentric positionality accounts for the paradoxical dynamic of the psyche sketched in chapter 4 of *The Limits of Community*, which Plessner now specifically references in a footnote (L: 344). As eccentrically positioned beings, each person can adopt the reflective position of the "pure I," which is the same for every person and therefore represents the standpoint of "we" or "humankind". From this reflective standpoint of eccentric detachment, each person can recognize himself as a contingent and irreplaceable individual bound to a unique living body (L: 343). "This contingency," declares Plessner, "is the reason for his pride and his shame" (L: 344). Plessner's remarks on this point focus on the shameful sense of "nullity" inflicted by the individual's eccentric awareness that "he could have also become the other" if contingencies of birth and life history had shaped his individual self differently. Yet it is telling that Plessner writes of a conjunction of pride and shame. For even though each of us knows of the contingency of his individual self, each of us must nevertheless find a way to identify with and live out, this contingent individual self. Because of the thoroughgoing eccentric mediation of centricity in human life, this identification cannot be a matter of regression to an animal-like absorption in one's centric perspective. Rather, it can only take the form of expressive agency by which one asserts and displays one's irreplaceable self in a social arena, impelled by pride taken in one's uniqueness and yet forever shadowed by the shame of contingency. At this point, Plessner recalls

The Limits of Community, and specifically the argument about "psychic being" in the fourth chapter:

> The nullity of his existence, its total permeability, and his knowledge of the fact that we are all basically the same because we, each for ourselves, are individuals and thus different from each other are the reasons for his shame (and only in a derivative sense the object of metaphysical humilitation and the beginning of humility). It is of course an indirect reason, mediated by the inner reality of psychic being. This gives rise to the ambiguity in which the human is torn between the urge to reveal himself and gain acknowledgment [*Drang nach Offenbarung und Geltung*] and the urge to hold back [*Drang nach Verhaltenheit*]. This ambiguity is one of the basic motives for social organization ... This is the ultimate justification for the claims made in *The Limits of Community* [...] (L: 344)

The reference to "the inner reality of psychic being" is decisive. For what individuates us above and beyond the uniqueness of each bodily organism is precisely the psyche, understood as an individualized and normatively regulated repertoire of dispositions that can figure as a determinate object of representation by its bearer as well as by fellow subjects.

The eccentric privilege of having an individualized psyche accounts for the pride that fuels the striving to express the psyche in its uniqueness in a determinate and public form. Yet the individual's correlative shameful awareness of the contingency of his identity prompts him to distance himself from whatever determinate ideal shape his psyche has assumed. This impulse bears witness to an underlying sense that the psyche's real, bodily ground is characterized by the plasticity of an eccentrically positioned living being's drives and therefore harbors a wealth of possibilities in excess of the psyche's determinate ideal existence. Each of us must to some extent sacrifice this wealth of possibilities for the sake of living as a stable but finally contingent individual. Yet a lingering awareness of the contingent character of this achievement prompts us to curb the expressive agency that produces the determinacy of the psyche's socially manifested ideal existence. We must stop short of full self-disclosure and at times withdraw from being fully known if we are to protect the plasticity of the psyche's real, bodily ground and keep ourselves open to other possible configurations of our individuality. For a living being that relates eccentrically to its own psyche, comportment (*Verhalten*) towards the world always involves a moment of restraint (*Verhaltenheit*).

In terms of Schelling's conceptual apparatus, we might say therefore that the pride associated with eccentric positionality drives us to establish the determinate ideal existence of the psyche, while the correlative moment of shame generates an impulse to protect the plasticity of the psyche's real ground. This means that the psyche can indeed be viewed as a sphere of indifference that precedes both its ideal existence and its real ground–in keeping with the analogy to Schelling's un-ground that has guided the reconstruction undertaken in this paper.

Conclusion

When Plessner outlined his conception of philosophical method in his 1920 *Habilitationsschrift* on Kant, he claimed that philosophy must take its guidance from a symbolic representation of the architectonic system that constituted its ultimate goal. This heuristically indispensable symbol was none other than the visible expression of the human person's "dignity" in the body's "deportment" (*Haltung*), by which Plessner meant the harmonious coordination of the whole body in accordance with the psyche's commitment to the norms of spirit (P 2: 246–249). By making the concept of human dignity central to the very practice of philosophy, Plessner attempted to salvage a cornerstone of the humanistic outlook inherited from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. In the *Habilitationsschrift*, the concept of human dignity was invoked only as a formally framed heuristic idea. We can now see that the concept of dignity acquires a determinate content in the philosophical psychology that Plessner adumbrates in the 1920s, which accounts for the pride and the shame of human personhood in terms of our eccentric positionality.

The point about Plessner's humanistic commitments highlights a potentially troubling feature of the philosophical psychology reconstructed in the above. That is, it might be objected that this conception of psychological reality presupposes a distinctively modern Western outlook and hence cannot lay claim to universal validity. After all, the types of psychological interpretation through which humans elaborate the ideal construct of the psyche are clearly subject to considerable historical and cultural variation. Indeed, even the hedonically valenced conditional sensations that constitute the real bodily ground of the psyche are not immune to such variation, as shown by ritual practices that alter humans' pain threshold. Influential philosophical and ethnographic arguments suggest that the very existence of a stable and individualized psyche presupposes a historically and culturally specific configuration of spirit. To the point are the genealogies of modern subjectivity sketched by Nietzsche (2014: 35–67) and Horkheimer and Adorno (2002: 35–62). Equally relevant are Maurice Leenhardt's ethnographic findings about Melanesians, as interpreted by Lindemann (2019): the basic units of Melanesian society are not individual persons but personal relationships, such that persons come into view only as members of various groups, or "dividuals". In such a society, as Lindemann (2019: 116f.) argues, the inner world takes the form of the group's inner life, which is distributed among members' bodies. Since this type of inner world does not consolidate into an individualized psyche, what we appear to have here (assuming the correctness of Leenhardt's ethnographic description) is the real bodily ground of psychological reality with no ideal counterpart–not even in the collective form of an outwardly demarcated "we," as Lindemann points out. These considerations point us toward one of the animating problems of Plessner's philosophical anthropology, namely, the question of whether it is possible to establish invariant characteristics of human life that amount to more than banal truisms. Plessner's answers to this question at various junctures of a career spanning six decades bear witness to the realignments in his theoretical approach and corresponding shifts in his substantive views (P 2: 274; L: 16; PA: 26–28; P 5: 161–163; P 8: 45f.; LaC: 7–11; P 7: 207–211; P 8: 164;

P 8: 216f.). It is at least arguable that some of Plessner's relevant reflections offer resources for addressing the worry about parochiality.

Bracketing this difficult issue for now, we can conclude that the philosophical psychology reconstructed here amounts to a non-reductively naturalistic account of the psyche, which accommodates the phenomenological aspects that invite the seemingly incompatible theses of psychological realism and idealism. Although Plessner does not present this theory in a systematic form, we are justified in ascribing it to him for three reasons. First, because it combines Plessner's various arguments about the psyche into a coherent whole; second, because such an account is implicit in Plessner's allusion to Schelling's predecessor theory; and third, because only a theory along these lines can ground the role of the psyche within Plessner's philosophical anthropology. To state the final point in more specific terms, the reconstruction proposed here explains why the psyche can play a mediating role in Plessner's trimorphistic conception of the human being. If the psyche enables spirit's norms to gain traction in our bodily lives, it can do so because its ideal existence presupposes spirit's horizon of intelligibility, while its real ground is bound up with embodied life. In this respect too, the parallel to Schelling should be clear, terminological differences notwithstanding. For, as we have seen, Schelling too locates personal inwardness between the real, corporeally anchored aspect of the mind and its ideal counterpart.

Yet this analogy also throws two important points of difference into relief. First, whereas the Schellingian concept of un-ground stands for a primordial indistinction from which both ground and existence issue, Plessner invokes Schelling's notion in reference to the persistent tension between the psyche's opposed tendencies, the one seeking to preserve the indeterminacy of the psyche's real ground and the other striving for the determinacy of ideal existence. The second point of difference is related to the one just noted. Schelling characterizes the place of personal inwardness between the real and the ideal aspect of the mind as an exposed situation of decision between good and evil. For Plessner too, the tension between opposing tendencies within the psyche is charged with ethical significance. Since, however, neither side enjoys ethical primacy, there can be no question of a decision in favor of either. In the end, both of these disanalogies can be chalked up to the broader contrast between Schelling's construal of human freedom in terms of a theory of revelation and Plessner's philosophical anthropology, which is couched in a relatively austere theory of living nature.

Unlike its Schellingian model, then, Plessner's conception of the psyche is fully compatible with the disenchanted modern view of nature. Less obviously, it has affinities with two major modernist meditations on the soul from the same era. The first one, found in Robert Musil's novel *The Man Without Qualities*, envisions the soul as a haphazard collection of contingently formed characters shadowed and relativized by a "passive fantasy" of unactualized possibilities (Musil, 1995: 30). The second one occurs in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, in which solitude allows the protagonist to shed her socially sanctioned personality and finally "be herself" by shrinking to "a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others," a dark reservoir of unlimited possibilities that affords both "freedom" and a "platform of stability" (Woolf, 2000: 69f.). Equally importantly, however, Plessner's

conception of the psyche deserves a hearing today as a plausible contender in contemporary philosophical discussion. In order to indicate some of its advantages, I will now briefly compare Plessner's philosophical psychology with Paul Ricoeur's and John McDowell's relevant arguments, which have been influential in continental and analytic quarters of contemporary philosophy, respectively.

Ricoeur (2014) develops his argument in the context of an interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis, a paradigm whose affinities with, and indebtedness to, Schelling's thinking I already noted in the opening section. Ricoeur's central observation is that psychoanalysis employs a mixed discourse intertwining a "dynamic" account of biological forces with a "hermeneutic" interpretation of symbolic meanings. Ricoeur takes this hybridity to reflect the fact that the psyche is caught in a permanent conflict between drive and culture–or, approaching the matter from the standpoint of philosophical reflection, between the subject's regression to the psyche's unconscious origins and a teleological progression towards "becoming-conscious" through the interpretive reappropriation of those unconscious origins. So understood, psychoanalysis presupposes realism about the psyche. As Gardner (2018: 197) puts it in his elaboration on Ricoeur's view, Freud's economic and topographic model of the psyche "accords the mental the same degree of reality as external physical objects," which means that "at least some of the entities which compose the mind are experienced unconsciously in a quasi-objectual manner". This was, we may recall, precisely how Haas framed his version of psychological realism, whose partial truth is acknowledged by Plessner. Yet, similarly to Plessner, Ricoeur maintains that the reality of the psyche is inextricable from its ideal aspect, its susceptibility to being shaped by consciousness. As Ricoeur puts the matter, psychoanalysis recognizes both "the reality of the id and the ideality of meaning: the reality of the id in disappropriation and the ideality of meaning in reappropriation; the reality of the id in the regression from effects of meaning, appearing on the conscious level, to drive at the level of the unconscious; the ideality of meaning in the movement of interpretation which initiates the movement of becoming-conscious" (Ricoeur, 1974: 173; translation modified). Gardner (2018: 198) summarizes the upshot of Ricoeur's argument by noting that the heterogeneity of psychoanalytic discourse manifests a "basic underlying schism in our constitution," namely, the "antinomy of the objective reality of the mental *versus* self-conscious subjectivity". This view agrees with Plessner's understanding of the real–ideal character of the psyche. A considerable advantage of Plessner's conception comes into view, however, if we note that Ricoeur treats the Janus-faced character of the psyche as a given. By contrast, Plessner's philosophical psychology, as reconstructed here, accounts for this duality in terms of a nature-philosophically grounded understanding of the characteristically human conjunction between centric and eccentric positionality.

This nature-philosophical framing allows, moreover, for a specification of what is distinctive to humans' psychological inwardness as contrasted with its animal counterpart. A comparison with John McDowell's relevant argument can bring out the strength of Plessner's philosophical psychology on this score. In *Mind and World*, McDowell distinguishes the sentience characteristic of animals' "proto-subjectivity" from the "inner world" disclosed in full-fledged human subjectivity (1996: 37–38, 119–121). Although McDowell grants that animals feel pains and fears, he

underlines, similarly to Plessner, that the affectively valenced sensory episodes of animals do not disclose an inner region of objectivity that the animal might think under concepts. It would seem to follow, as Bain (2009: 11) suggests, that animals' perspectival awareness of external environments (as distinct from humans' potentially objective representations of the outer world) has a counterpart in a purely subjective because exclusively first-personally accessible, form of inwardness in which no distinction is made between a perspectival lived experience and the interior objectivity disclosed by it. McDowell, however, flatly declares that "'inner environment' does not make sense" (1996: 120). Yet the warrant for the *prima facie* curious idea of an inner environment should be clear from Plessner's account of higher animals' centric positionality–and, in particular, from his previously discussed argument for the claim that "animals are soul but they do not have a soul" (E: 190).

In fact, since human life according to Plessner involves constant shifts between predominantly centric and predominantly eccentric attitudes, humans too can become captivated by an inner environment when they are completely consumed by their lived experiences.[16] McDowell has difficulty accommodating this phenomenon. Yet he also fails to account for the converse possibility, that of an eccentric, objective stance towards our inner world. As a consequence, he lacks resources for construing humans' inner world as involving an individualized psyche. What gets in the way of such an account is McDowell's thoroughgoing idealism about the inner world, which resembles the Neo-Kantian view discussed in the section on "Idealism Versus Realism About the Psyche" (McDowell, 1996: 37–38, 120–21). According to McDowell, inner experiences are potentially objective, i.e., capable of disclosing substantial states of affairs, but only in a peculiarly diminished sense. When a pain registers in my consciousness, I can think this inner experience under a concept that is in principle also applicable third-personally, as "a particular case of a general type of state of affairs, *someone's* being in pain" (McDowell, 1996: 37). However, he holds that we are here dealing with a "limiting case" of objectivity," for the object of my awareness of pain is "really nothing over and above the awareness itself" (McDowell, 1996: 120). As Bain (2009) points out, the latter claim is difficult to uphold even with respect to such seemingly straightforward inner experiences as pains, whose justificatory, presentational, and classificatory character it cannot account for. The untenability of McDowell's psychological idealism becomes fully evident when we turn to those inner experiences–of particular interest to psychoanalysis–which are shaped by but do not accurately represent, latent desires and aversions, subliminal affects, tacit beliefs and understandings, and traumatic memories. By contrast, Plessner's Schellingian reconciliation between idealism and realism about the psyche can account for both the substantial reality and the plasticity of psychological contents.

The continued relevance of Plessner's philosophical psychology might seem surprising in view of its affinity, evidently recognized by Plessner himself, with Schelling's conception of personhood. It is not often that a philosophical framework

[16] There is indeed a sense in which talk of a perspectival environment has an even stronger warrant in the inner than in the outer case, for an inner state captivating us, unlike an external environment, can actually be transformed by our mere awareness of it (L: 296).

hearkening back to theological and mystical figures of thought provides a model for a successor theory that can still contribute to philosophical discussion today as a plausible contender. Yet this is precisely the finding that has emerged from our reconstruction of Plessner's philosophical psychology. Besides offering an illuminating account of an important topic that has been neglected in most quarters of contemporary philosophy, Plessner's Schellingian conception of the psyche also illustrates the ability of certain theoretical constructs to remain fruitful even after transplantation into a markedly different context.

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